



COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

Volume XXVII Number 5
September-October 1979
ISSN 0010-3780

COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWSLETTER is published six times a year by Community Service, Inc. Our purpose is to promote the small community as a basic social institution involving organic units of economic, social and spiritual development.

will the circles be unbroken?

CONFERENCE REPORT

by Don Hollister & Jane Folmer

How often does a group of strangers gather to discuss the basic assumptions of society and overall cultural shifts? That is what the "Children and Community" conference turned out to be. Though we were far from definitive the discussions started new trains of thought (for me).

Throughout the conference there was an unstated assumption that the quality of relations between people is key to healthy child development. Outside of institutional living families are the immediate ground for human relations. We listed different forms of family without attempting to distinguish qualities. This is expressed in a Vanier Institute statement, "Recognize and respect all forms of family life... which encourage its members to live and love fully, as responsible persons in community with one another."

If you favor these qualities -- love and social responsibilities -- how do you identify which forms encourage them? Are all living patterns equal in their fostering of caring? Among the sorts of family mentioned in the conference were: typical, nuclear, urban nuclear, farm, gay, extended, tribal, communal, ethnic, single parent, intentionally childless, cooperative.

The continuity of a way of life depends on transferring traditions, skills and knowledge from generation to generation. If a society wants to assure its survival,

it had better look to its children and the relation between generations. This circle of common experience is fragile.

In our conference at best we considered the nature of the circle. Our concern was not how to foster a particular way of life. I personally have a way of life that I cherish. It may not be as distinctive as say the Amish, yet it is definitely different than that of many people around me. There are many good ways to live, but what will happen if we say that all ways are acceptable? Do your own thing. Choose your way when you grow up. Be free. I look back on the conference as a challenge to examine our circles of life and to consider the effect of our own behavior on the future of the children around us.

* * * *

Summaries of the conference talks and discussions follow.

DOROTHY CLARK

Dorothy Clark presented a picture of her own life alternating daily between a world of poverty and isolation where her Head Start children live and a neighborhood community on the block where her own family lives. She considers her home neighborhood to be a model close knit healthy community. Neighbors participate

in each others' lives. When she listed the dozen households on her street -- three single adults, two single parents with children, one unmarried couple, two unmarried couples with children, one blended family (remarried with children from current marriage and both previous marriages) and three "typical" families with married parents with children -- she realized that family arrangements are as "abnormal" in her relatively ideal neighborhood as are those of her Head Start children. Until taking this mental census she had assumed that the families on her home street were somehow more "normal." The key, she feels, is the presence of various informal support systems on her street and in the wider neighborhood.

In discussion of this, other conference participants pointed out that diversity of nuclear family situation is not unique to our current period of apparent family disintegration. Death once forced continual family rearrangements just as divorce does today. There were no "good old days" of family stability. The real breakdown would appear to be in the intimate patterns of sharing and support, of an extended family, church group or neighborhood.

Dorothy Clark stressed that individuals and families are not to blame for their isolation or poverty or other particular problem. Broader forces were cited in the discussion. We need to look for alternatives to "the package that we've bought. People listed the problems of profit as a prime motive; the devaluation of children; the public school replacing family and neighborhood in socialization; the industrial mind; the lack of community.

The discussion of alternatives returned to ways of fostering community. Varying suggestions were made: "Instill self-esteem." "People need to experience a close relationship while they are children." "You do not have to (or can not) jump into a total new life." "Offer and accept support in changing." "Children are a good focus for adults meeting adults." The only clarity was a question. "How can we help each other develop a sense of community?"

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## TOM ABEL

Tom Abel is currently involved in the creation of an intentional community of fellowship called New South Lifestyles which is made up of several families in the Wetumpka, Alabama, area where he lives. He spoke about "Person-growth; a Continuous Process," which, he pointed out, is another term for what Bronfenbrenner referred to as the "socialization process."

As he addressed the group he echoed Bronfenbrenner's concern for the disadvantaged child, but at the same time indicating that socially and emotionally disadvantaged children come from middle-class and affluent homes as well as from the economically disadvantaged and that intensive and enduring relationships between child and adult are not correlated with economic wellbeing.

The primary concern expressed throughout his presentation was the continuous, loving interaction which is needed for "person-growth" at all stages of peoples' lives, not just while they are children. He acknowledged the real value of the intentional communities movement in encouraging the sharing and cooperation between individuals and families which fosters this growth.

In order for our country to provide a healthier environment for children and families, he said, a change is required in our society's emphasis on the independence of the individual. A healthy and flexible balance of dependence and independence is needed in order to encourage people at all



levels of growth. There is still far too little opportunity for the "satisfaction of emotional needs and the development of a value system that gives meaning to life in a culture which makes a fetish of independence.

#### ALAN MIRABELLI

Alan Mirabelli of the Vanier Institute of the Family in Ottawa, Canada, spoke on the Institute's past and present efforts to understand the family and its needs. He explained that the Institute has attempted in various ways to examine the family as a structure but found looking at the society as a whole to be much more productive. Only when they turned their attention outward to education, economics, health services, media, and the other various aspects of the society that effect families did they begin to have an understanding of the variety of forms and interactions which constitute a family.

The degree of success obtained by families was found to be largely determined by the presence or absence of community. Families based in community were found to have much more of the strength and adaptability necessary to survive and were doing so in spite of outside influences rather than because of them.

Several thought-provoking examples were given of small communities of families working together in a cooperative effort, maintaining their independence and integrity, doing for themselves what needs to be done as they have for generations. The most provocative example was the description of a small fishing community on Cape Breton Island whose entire economy was based on coastal fishing. The seasonal nature of their employment made it necessary for them to apply for unemployment funds for a major part of the year. The government had difficulty making their unusual circumstances fit into the existing structure but finally determined that, to be eligible for unemployment services, a fisherman would have to meet a quota during his active season.

Well accustomed to pulling together for survival at sea, the men devised their own system to prevent them all from losing their benefits as the result of a poor season. They worked to fill the quota of each man in turn so that at the end of the season at least some were eligible for unemployment benefits which were then shared equally among them. The sharing of work and rewards is essential to all aspects of their healthy, caring society.

The key message of the talk seems to be that learning how to be an effective member of a family, a community, or a society, takes place through the active imitation of successful models. It happens not in any prescribed or structured setting, but in the homes and communities where families live and grow.

## Letter on the Conference

I enjoyed the conference very much. I don't often meet people who share a perspective on the importance of community to good development of children. To be for a weekend among a group of people who from diverse backgrounds share that understanding was for me, wonderful. If not all was expressed that might have been in the course of our discussion, perhaps we can continue by means of exchange of letters and information in the Community Service NEWSLETTER.

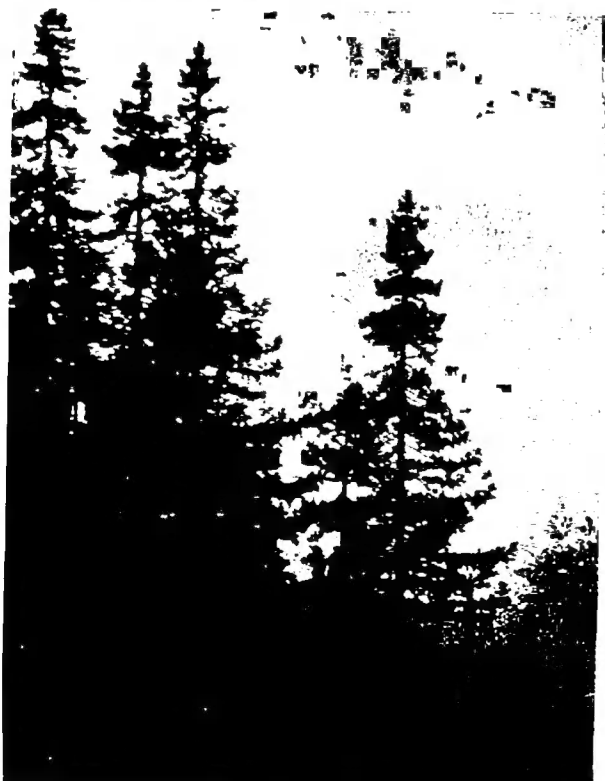
What emerged for me with more clarity than before is the importance of children for those of us who would intentionally build community. It is not at first glance obvious why children should be a center of effort in community building -- though it is evident the extent of deprivation of children in our urban civilization with all its pressures for jobs and lack of emphasis on extended family structure. The reason children are so important in the effort to rebuild community is that they provide a focus around which adults can build a network of associations -- a community.

In my experience growing up in Utica, New York, with idealistic parents who

didn't have a lot to live on, my brother and I were the focus of my parents' efforts as well as the subject of attention of two sets of grandparents. My father and mother were and are both civic minded and helped organized group activity among the parents of children in our area (a citizen's association in my father's case, and a foreign language study group in neighborhood living rooms in my mother's case). The outreach in this setting occurred among people who had in common the responsibility of their children and families and the desire to provide a better society for them. The result was a group effort.

Therefore I think that children can provide a focus for effort at intentional community. By working for others instead of placing all the emphasis on self (which all the pressures of life tend toward) we build much more than is possible in isolation. Children can help very greatly in overcoming the individual's preoccupation with self by providing a powerful reason for people to work together toward the future of the young ones among them.

Jud Brown, Maryland



## Universals of Community

by Arthur E. Morgan (1950)

The pursuit of community should not be an effort to force society back into an old pattern. The new world to be will not recapitulate to the old. It will have its own life, its own form, its own genius. At best it may be better than anything which has passed.

The old, isolated, provincial primary-group community is going, never to return as it once was. Yet there are elements of its life and structure that are as fundamental to wholesome and continuing social life as air, water, clothing and shelter are necessary to physical living. It is the business of the community movement to discover what are these elemental necessities for good social living, and to try to see that they are not omitted in any patterns of social life which may emerge in our rapidly evolving society.

These universal elements of good social life include community responsibility for the land and natural resources. They will include open spaces for children to live and grow freely, without frustrating restraint. Natural resources should not only include fertile soil, productive forest, mineral resources and clear streams, but also garden spaces, play spaces, sheer wilderness and primeval forest. They should include bodies of water, available to all people.

The social units in which children grow up and in which their elders live should be large enough to provide varied fellowship, and small enough to make general acquaintances possible. Children should feel at home and secure in such communities. They should find life varied enough and intimate enough so that they will get its feel and its texture, and learn the arts of living by seeing them in operation and by participation in them. The communities in which children grow up are the chief media for transmitting from past to future generations the quality and spirit of life; the considerateness which makes

social life good, the friendships and neighboring which make it secure and full of flavor; the responsibilities and integrities which give it fiber.

The community in which people live should provide varied and adequate economic opportunity, so that for the coming generations there may be an economic basis for its continuity and for their continuity in it. There should be good educational opportunity and varied cultural resources.

The community should be not only a social organization, but a social organism, with its own life and personality, into which each community member pours part of his own personality and life and spirit, so that the community into which he was born, or another which he chooses for his life setting, shall be changed, refined, and enriched by his living, becoming to some degree his immortality. This means that a good community is not an evanescent thing, to make and use and discard, but one of the long-continuing and most precious creations of humanity.

We shall not find a union of those universally essential elements of good social living by waiting for them to appear out of the drift of current life. We must explore and discover what they are. We must have deep spiritual and emotional commitment for those values. We must make those values a normal part of our whole philosophy and program of life. We must undertake by discipline, experiment and patient practice to direct our own lives so that these characteristics and values of social life shall come into being.

The human species is a product of social living. The beauty, the refinement, the courage, the integrity, the purposefulness of social life are not given with any clear definition in our biological make-up, but are the product of our social inheritance. It is necessary that we search for the universal values of our social inheritance and with them create the structure and the quality of the social life that is to be.



## Act II Communities

Excerpts from ACT II NEWSLETTER, August 1979

"Act II Communities" is a non-profit corporation organized for the education of adults about productive and fulfilling alternative life styles; for the development of models for community; to sponsor/encourage groups and activities that further these broad goals. As such, "Act II Communities" is not a group planning to live together in community. Rather, it is an umbrella group which will encourage and assist intentional residential groups as one of its purposes. Such communities may be chapters of Act II. "Act II Communities" adopted its bylaws and began existence as it is presently constituted two years ago, in May, 1977.

Act II stands for a concept--a new life-style for mid-life people--that is cooperative and fulfilling rather than competitive and frustrating. This life-style de-emphasizes material belongings, and asserts the much greater value of caring human interaction. The end result of this view is living together in intentional communities. This is easy to say, but hard to do, and this is where Act II is proving its worth.

Mid-life people have different needs and desires for community than the young people who began communal living groups ten or fifteen years ago. One of our needs is for a sense of permanence, as contrasted with a sense of excitement and experimentation. But when we look at "permanent" successful groups, some of the best models are those founded ten or fifteen years ago by young people who had little capital, but abundant enthusiasm and energy. In contrast, many Act II people have substantial assets, acquired over many years of hard work, and a sense of caution about investing heavily of their time and money in a whole new life style. But there is so much to be gained by community living, that we continue to grope for an aggregation of successful experience, and proven techniques which can be adopted to our own circumstances.



At every conference, we have heard from people who have lived in community, and have learned of things that work and of problems that arise. We have explored the legal and economic forms which a community could take, and we have taken lessons in interpersonal relating techniques that have been successful for others. We have meditated together and danced together, and talked to each other. We have considered what shared visions might form the basis of a community for us, and we have met people with whom we might be comfortable in community, and others with whom we could not be comfortable. For at least some of us, the concept of a mid-life community is much more tangible and rather less frightening than it was a year or two ago. There may still be a long way to go, but it seems undeniable that some progress has been made. Considering the magnitude of the challenge involved in our seeking, even "some progress" is a rewarding feeling.

In January, 1979, a group from New York state approached "Act II Communities" with a concept for a retirement community to be built for people of limited financial resources, with federal housing assistance. The application of this group for a charter as a chapter of "Act II Communities" was accepted in February. They have since been incorporated as a non-profit corporation in the state of New York, and are proceeding with their efforts to bring a residential community to fruition.



## Folk School Association

Each year's Folk School Conference seems to be a fine experience -- and quite different from the others. (This year's conference was held at Donebod, Minnesota.)

Two major items this year. The constitution was approved, with change of name to Folk School Association of America, in order to match the broader area of interest which we seem to be covering. And we were invited to hold our 1980 mini-folk-school-conference at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC, which we view as a major step forward, and of course have accepted. The time will probably be the same as this year -- the second full week in July.

I am exploring the possibility of having the 1981 conference in the northeast-- either at Powell House (the Quaker conference center near Albany) or at one of the educational institutions in Cobleskill or Oneonta. It would be nice if someone from Community Service could plan to attend the next conference.

Kay Parke, New York



## Recent CSI visitors

Visitors to Community Service this summer have been both old friends and new. The conference in July brought the return visit of former staff member Judson Brown from Ashton, Maryland, Mary Lehmann from the newly organized Moniteau Farm Community near Jefferson City, Missouri, and Dr. Nicholas Linderman, a longtime Community Service member from Batavia, NY.

In addition to the many new friends who came to the conference, we were glad to welcome Steve Washam, a young man from Pasadena, California. Steve is traveling across the country in search of alternative, cooperative resources and we were pleased to be of help during his visit to Yellow Springs in September.

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#### EDITOR'S NOTE

We not only welcome letters to the editor, but articles about any exceptional communities you know of or people who are doing unusual things to improve the life in their towns. Anyone submitting an article should enclose a self-addressed envelope if he/she wishes it returned if we cannot use it. The only recompense for use we can offer is the pleasure of seeing it in print and knowing that you have spread a good and useful idea.



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#### STAFF

Don Hollister, Jane Folmer, Gris Morgan, and Jane Morgan, editor.

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COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWSLETTER is published bi-monthly by Community Service, Inc., P. O. Box 243, Yellow Springs, OH 45387. Phone (513) 767-2161 or 767-1461. One year's subscription with U.S. zip code is \$5; Foreign--\$6, paid in U.S. currency; \$11 for airmail overseas.

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" '...man has no body distinct from the soul' (Blake) -- no health of body distinct from health of earth; no wholeness of individual apart from wholeness of community; no wholeness of one community apart from concern for health of the whole human community."

Pendle Hill 1979 Fall Bulletin

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